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The significance of characterization in the narrative love poems of John Keats: a critical study

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHARACTERIZATION IN THE NARRATIVE LOVE POEMS OF JOHN KEATS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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abstract

The characters in the principle narrative love poems of John Keats ("Endymion," "Isabella," "Eve of St. Agnes," "Lamia," and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci") are important keys to understanding the Keatsian view of Man's essence. All of the protagonists, except Lycius in "Lamia," are visionaries whose souls are engaged by the transcending power of Love, and whose characters are eclipsed, when their souls achieve a "fellowship with (Love's) essence." Such surrender of Self to one's heart, soul, and the free flight on one's imagination suggests an adherence to Keats' concept of the artist as an agent of the imagination, incapable of becoming a fixed personality. Only Lycius is a captive of his self and unable to realize the supreme state, which is attained only through an adherence to Keats' concept of "negative capability." "lamie" suggests that a narcissistic person is doomed to only petty, earthly delights. In the other poems, the poet celebrates the disappearance of Self and the subsequent involvement with more sacred pleasures. The minor characters are presented as foils, or supporters, of the protagonists, in order to highlight the latter's search for loftier, more universal goals. Keats' own self-image precluded only a gossamer semblance of a fixed, definable self. He saw him-

self as a process, a means to realize Truth, rather than Truth itself. He knew of mysteries inherent in the known. He sensed absolutes. For the most part, his main characters are important as carriers of refined Truth, or soul people, rather than unique, ideosyncratic people whose actions are governed by self-gratifying instincts. This choice suggests two diverging views of Man's nature that Keats confronted, but never completely resolved in his characters.

The protagonists are shallow characterizations, but as such they serve to reflect the spiritualism that can transcend the worldly differences among men. In this way, Keats uses characters to present the possibility of an experience unique to Man--the presentation of one's self as human kindling, to offer one's self as sacrifice, to the fires of divine Love; the resulting cremation of one's worldly self being the purgation of one's self and the triumphant ascension of one's soul. In his narrative love poems Keats suggests (almost with finality) that in this way Man can realize the release and true expression of his essence, and all in the context of the living rather than life after death.

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Robert D. Stout, Dean
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Dear Dean Stout:

Please find enclosed my Master's Thesis. It was approved by Professors Harson and Hartung on December 17, 1971, but was rejected by the Graduate School office because of technicalities with margins and format of footnotes and bibliography. It is now repaired--totally retyped--and ready to be microfilmed.

Inasmuch as this manuscript constitutes my last requirements for my M.A., would you be kind enough to notify the English Department of your approval.

Sincerely,

David W. Stocking

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHARACTERIZATION IN THE NARRATIVE LOVE POEMS OF JOHN KEATS: A CRITICAL STUDY

by

David W. Stocking

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

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in

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February 11, 1972

(date)

Robert J. Hauser

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Introduction

Any student of Romantic poetry must readily frown with skepticism when either the word "narrative" or "characterization" is used as a focal term in a study of John Keats. Perhaps more than any of his illustrious contemporaries, Keats has been regarded critically as the rich lyricist, the "purest" of the Romantic poets, whose success stems from a deep dedication to the principle of art for art's sake. Rather than a teller of stories, Keats is a contemplative artist, perhaps best known for his vivid and precise sketches of still life or his ability to capture in words the essence of things eternal. Above all, his poetry reflects a personal quest for higher truths and deeper secrets through a sensitive probing of the outward manifestations of nature. For these reasons, those who have written about Keats have tended to concentrate on the development of the style, form and meaning of his poetry.[1]

In other words, picture windows have been used. It is this writer's intention to peer through a more obscure and less used aperture in the ever-expanding house of scholarship that has been built around Keats, and try to illuminate a particular facet of his work that has not yet received very close scrutiny, and which could, upon magnification, shed new light upon the nature of his short but

meteoric artistic life.

More specifically, the characterizations in his narrative love poems open up a kind of telescopic view of Keats' view of mortality's possibilities. Through studying the raison d'etre of major and minor characters, one can better understand what John Keats thought was significant about life, and in turn what we as readers should consider important about the poet. The first chapter of the study concerns "The Visionaries," and deals with major characters, all of whom experience an intense transcendence into a spiritual realm as a result of luring visions. The second chapter, entitled "The Functionaries," discusses the minor characters and how they contribute balance both to the poet's collection of characterizations and to his overall conception of the human state. In conclusion, a short chapter entitled "The Poet: Conclusion" suggests how John Keats' main characters may be extensions of the poet's own self-image.

Chapter I THE VISIONARIES

In the opening stanza of "The Fall of Hyperion -- A Dream," John Keats echoes an important dimension of his poetic consciousness in the words: " . . . every man whose soul is not a clod / Hath visions." (ll. 13-14). In his narrative love poems, this poet uses visions as the central force. These particular poems, in fact, are about visions.[2] As narratives they are also about individuals who have visions, or visionaries. To Keats, the ability of a character to experience visions makes his existence particularly significant for it shows his soul to be the essence of his character.

The first important narrative poem John Keats was to write consisted of 4,047 lines, all of which traced the odyssey of the soul of a shepherd who comes to realize, through a series of visions, that happiness lies

> . . . In that which becks
> Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
> A fellowship with essence: till we shine,
> Full alchemized, and free of space. Behold
> The clear religion of heaven! (Book I,
> ll. 777-781)

Endymion, in the poem by this name, is beckoned by an unshakable female spirit to share in an extraterrestrial union with her. Once stung by the vision, which he has experienced just prior to the opening of the poem, he becomes intoxicated and abandons everything to search for an immortal entanglement. His quest is not an easy one, since

the visions of divine beauty are only temporary, and are inevitably followed by periods of painful despair. In addition, the moments of transcendence are beyond the grasp of Endymion's cognitive powers. Such faculties come into play only when he is aware of what he is without. The activities of Endymion's soul are the epiphanal catalyst, and thus the emotive determinant, in the shepherd's life. His mind, his logic, his will, and indeed all the outward trappings of his character become subservient to the mysterious commandments of his soul.

In describing to Peona, his sister, the advent of his first vision, Endymion explains how he saw a rich floral bed in the sky at sunset and sat down to figure out its meaning.

> . . . Thus on I thought,
> Until my head was dizzy and distraught.
> Moreover, through the dancing poppies stole
> A breeze, most softly lulling to my soul;
> And shaping visions all about my sight
> Of colours, wings, and bursts of spangly lights;
> The which become more strange, and strange, and dim,
> And then were gulph'd in a tumultuous swim:
> And then I fell asleep. Ah, can I tell
> The enchantment that afterwards befel?
> Yet it was but a dream; yet such a dream
> That never tongue, although it overteem
> With mellow utterance, like a cavern spring,
> Could figure out and to conception bring
> All I beheld and felt. (Book I, ll. 564-578)

Once the soul is activated within a person like Endymion, who is receptive to extrasensory persuasions, there occurs a kind of inversion whereby the self is destroyed and the

soul is loosed to journey where it will. Even when the intense suspension of the vision has passed and the narrator is prompted to say "how cruel and sore / The journey homeward to habitual self!" (Book II, ll. 275-6), it is not the former Endymion who returns. The vision commands such profound attention from his entire being that his self can never be the same. Endymion's earthbound self becomes only the void that is left when the vision is gone. His self, therefore, is all the more unbearable, since it has become the taunting absence of immortal bliss. At one point, the narrator speaks of Endymion when he is not affected by uplifting visions:

> What misery most drowningly doth sing
> In lone Endymion's ear, now he has raught
> The goal of consciousness? Ah, 'tis the
> thought,
> The deadly feel of solitude: for lo!
> He cannot see the heavens, nor the flow
> Of rivers, nor hill-flowers running wild . . .
> (II, ll. 281-286)

It becomes clear early in the poem that Endymion will either cross that "mortal bar" and consummate his quest in a heavenly realm, or languish and gradually decompose in the throes of visionless solitude.

Throughout the episodes subsequent to his initial visions, Endymion is encouraged by Venus (II, 573; III, 1026-7), Cynthia (II, ll. 211-12), Love (II, 809-10), old Glaucus (III, 709-710) and Neptune (III, 908-9) to pursue the inner promptings of his soul. In foreshadowing the final

transport of Endymion's essence from a mortal cage to rapturous freedom in immortality, Keats emphasizes the significance of the visions. They are the bastion of Truth and Beauty, and mortal man can experience such quintessence only through the selfless ascension of his soul. Such an uplifting experience <u>is possible</u> in Keats' view, and this belief is of paramount importance in determining the function of the visions and the mortals who are susceptible to them. The earnestness of Endymion's odyssey is reflected in the shepherd's own words when he says, early in the poem,

> "Now, if this earthly love has power to make
> Men's being mortal, immortal; to shake
> Ambition from their memories, and brim
> Their measure of content: what merest whim,
> Seems all this poor endeavour after fame,
> To one, who keeps within his stedfast aim
> A love immortal, an immortal too.
> Look not so wilder'd; for these things are true,
> And never can be born of atomies
> That buzz about our slumbers, like brain-flies,
> Leaving us fancy-sick. No, no, I'm sure
> My restless spirit never could endure
> To breed so long upon one luxury,
> Unless it did, though fearfully, espy
> A hope beyond the shadow of a dream."
> (Book I, ll. 843-857)

At the close of the poem, when Endymion is expressing a preference for the life of a hermit-in-sadness, the vision becomes a reality when Phoebe, the mortal Indian maiden who has been Endymion's close companion, reveals that she is the incarnation of Cynthia, the goddess of the Moon, and the luring spirit of all his dreams. Yet earlier in the poem, when Endymion is attracted to Phoebe, this magnetism is

described as a force emanating from his soul -- which again defies any reaching for the powers of reason.

> . . . yet he turn'd once more to look
> At the sweet sleeper, -- all his soul was
> shook, --
> She press'd his hand in a slumber; so once more
> He could not help but kiss her and adore.
> (IV, ll. 452-5)

His soul he cannot understand; only obey.

> Can I prize thee, fair maid, all prize above,
> Even when I feel as true as innocence?
> I do, I do -- What is this soul then? Whence
> Came it? It does not seem my own, and I
> Have no self-passion or identity.
> Some fearful end must be: Where, where is it?
> (IV, ll. 473-8)

Only the soul's secret will can make something more than a sensual delight of a fair maiden's presence. Moreover, it is the tyranny of his soul that keeps Endymion's sights on ephemeral, transient images and protects the true identity of the Indian maiden. Only his soul knows her essence -- his reason can not. In the closing passages of the poem, Endymion can tolerate nothing but the abysmal solitude of the proselytized hermit, wherein he can at least savor the sadness of acute disappointment. Only there could he nurse the conscious aftereffects of his soul's apparent suicide. The alternative to fulfillment is not in fact return to habitual self. Rather there is return to a self that is but an empty shell which can be affected by only immortal intervention. Such is the case with Endymion, and only the last-minute rescue by the disguised Cynthia saves

him from plunging into a nothingness from which he wouldn't return.

He is saved, however, because he pursues his vision, because he believes instinctively in the "hope beyond the shadow of a dream." 3 The instinct vibrates out of his soul, that unknown progenitor which drives him away from himself to both the threshold of ascension and the brink of suicide.

The choice is between all or nothing, and what the answer will be perplexes the visionary once he has felt the rapture of a communion with divine essence. There is no compromise. Furthermore, the one perplexed is helpless because the involuntary decision is a matter of the soul's flight. Human will can be affected by the soul, but not vice-versa. The human condition is radically altered once the radiance of Love consumes the carriage of the human soul. Love, more than any other spirit, annihilates the self, causing an eclipse of character.

But there are
Richer entanglements, enthralments far
More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
To the chief intensity: the crown of these
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
Upon the forehead of humanity.
All its more ponderous and bulky worth
Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth
A steady splendour; but at the tip-top
There hangs by unseen film, an orbed drop
Of light, and that is love: its influence,
Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,
At which we start and fret; till in the end,
Melting into its radiance, we blend,
Mingle, and so become a part of it, --
Nor with aught else can our souls interknit

> So wingedly: when we combine therewith,
> Life's self is nourish'd by its proper pith,
> And we are nurtured like a pelican brood.
> (I, ll. 797-815)

In "The Eve of St. Agnes" Keats chooses a maiden, Madeline, as a principal visionary. She too, like Endymion, is to experience the "chief intensity," and as a result find herself slave to her arbitrary soul. For Madeline, her soul will take her beyond the bourne of human affairs to the precipice where she will surrender herself either to the desolation of an abortive vision or to the consummation of a promising vision. In this particular narrative, however, Madeline is to find herself confronted with Porphyro, when she awakes from her dream. Upon waking,

> "Ah Porphyro!" said she, "but even now
> Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,
> Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;
> And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:
> How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and
> drear!
> Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
> Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!
> Oh, leave me not in this eternal woe,
> For is thou diest, my Love, I know not where
> to go." (Stanza XXXV)

Still in a trance, and still imagining both the ideal and real lovers to be present, Madeline finds herself trembling with both fear and hope. In the next stanza her receiving of Porphyro into her dream enmeshes him in the "richer entanglements," and he becomes the consummating agent who gives her vision a mortal, more immediate stamp of reality. Yet even then, there is the tension in Madeline which makes

her afraid that Porphyro will abandon her now -- now that her "heart is lost" in his. The subsequent schism, the involuntary perplexity in Madeline's mind, is an inevitable transition from ideality to reality; but the fact that she and Porphyro fly off to his southern moors suggests that the vision is realized in mortal terms. Again there is the Keatsian suggestion that a vision can be realized in real life if the visionary pursues the "hope beyond the shadow of a dream."

"The Eve of St. Agnes," however, deals with two main characters who are consciously, indeed selfishly, pursuing their love object. Madeline willingly gives herself up to the ritual love-letting of St. Agnes' Eve, and Porphyro slips through dangers and barriers to espy the woman he adores. They act on their own, actually approaching a kind of self-fulfillment rather than a self-destroying goal, until the magic moments of the vision's evanescence:

> Wherewith disturbed, she utter'd a soft moan:
> He ceased -- she panted quick -- and suddenly
> Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone:
> Upon his knees he sank, as smooth-sculptured
> stone. (Stanza XXXIII)

As opposed to "Endymion," the inversion of character is evident only in the climactic moment of union, when

> Into her dream he melted, as the rose
> Blendeth its odour with the violet, --
> (Stanza XXXVI)

Their souls are then in a kind of symbiotic rapture: their essences become one essence, the "solution sweet," and their conscious selves have disappeared. They have become something higher, more divine, and they too can not return to their "habitual selves." The experience has altered their individual volitions so that they can be expressed, from then on, only in terms of trying to achieve fellowship with essence. They covet the preciousness of their new marriage, and it is the promise of its recurring "in a finer tone" that drives them on. This is their hope. Yet perhaps the most significant aspect of their adventure in love is their having brought it about themselves.

Keats chose indirect characterization for "The Eve of St. Agnes," and forced himself to rely almost exclusively on what the characters did and said. There is no elaborate description of internal imagery, as in "Endymion." Omniscience, perhaps, came to seem presumptuous to Keats. In this way he acknowledges something significant about the nature of essence itself. To each person it is unique and incomprehensible -- and certainly not easily distilled into words. Porphyro considers himself "a famish'd pilgrim -- sav'd by miracle." The pinnacle of his own self-destroying flight, when "he arose / Ethereal, flush'd and like a throbbing star / Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose," (Stanza XXXVI, ll. 321-2) was achieved by a force greater

than himself, and he can acknowledge only that. He doesn't say he has achieved his goal; rather, something has achieved it for him. One senses that the mortal who courageously (even recklessly) seeks a total encounter with Love, and is willing to surrender himself to its own mysterious exigencies rather than his own designs, will indeed taste the "solution sweet."

It must be born in mind that only at that timeless, immortal moment when character is totally eclipsed can there be a true fusion of souls. Notice, however, that in "Eve of St. Agnes" the climactic imagery of the visions are contained within the minds of Madeline and Porphyro, and not revealed to the reader. Keats, the narrator, chose to stay out of his characters, knowing that we all have our "guesses at heaven" and that each of us has dreams according to his own particular nature. It is when our dreams or visions pass out of this limited frame of reference and find their own way through the deeper, perhaps divine instincts of our basic humanity that the true essence of Man can be expressed. The soul, again, is the essence of Man's character. Other than that, however, each man is a law unto himself. Porphyro's experience, for instance, though he is eventually to unite with Madeline in a moment of ecstatic transcendence, is dramatically different from Madeline's. In pursuit of their respective visions, each follows a

different path of ascent: and once the peak has been reached, the re-emergence out of and away from the visions reveals contrasting characteristics.

Porphyro comes to the castle of Hildebrand taking his life into his hands, because of a family feud. His objective is to see the beautiful Madeline. In so doing, however, he must run a gauntlet of dangers. Approaching a castle whose

> chambers held barbarian hordes,
> Hyena foeman, and hot-blooded lords,
> Whose very dogs would excrations howl
> Against his lineage (Stanza X)

Porphyro pauses, "and implores / All saints to give him sights of Madeline." At the same moment, Madeline is in her room offering herself, as well, to sainthood in hopes of glimpsing her own lover. The goals overlap, but each must take his own route. Porphyro beguiles an old maid, Angela, to lead him to his love's chamber, which she does "Through many a dusky gallery." Before she does this, however, Angela informs Porphyro of Madeline's participation in the rites of St. Agnes' Eve;

> But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told
> His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook
> Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold
> And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.
> (Stanza XV)

At this point Porphyro is primed for psychological ascent out of his character as well as an actual ascent to

Madeline's bedroom. Not only is there excitement in the face of danger, but Porphyro has had to traverse many miles and obstacles, and just before he gets there he realizes that Madeline is in her bed experiencing visions of love. It is his own cunning and will that get him to Madeline's closet. Once he sees her, however, he is in the power of the vision before him. She has become an ideal, the ultimate essence.

The lover who appears in Madeline's dream is also, of course, ideal. She has primed herself by adhering strictly to rituals of the legend. Older women have spoken to her about young virgins and how, on the Eve of St. Agnes,

> . . . supperless to bed they must retire,
> And couch supine their beauties, lily white;
> Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require
> Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire. (Stanza VI)

This is precisely what Madeline does in order to prepare herself. She is fully ready to embrace the machinations of her fancy. She is the young, pure, and ripe virgin whose sole purpose in the poem is to have "visions of delight" and "soft adorings" from her love. She wants to suspend her disbelief. There are, however, no true-to-life dangers for her as there are for Porphyro. She need merely retire to her private chambers and surrender herself to her dreams.

As a result of ideal conditions and the blessing of nothing less than St. Agnes, Madeline's vision takes place

in ethereal realms where all is chastely perfect. She enters her vision by voluntarily suspending her senses and emotions, and letting supernatural forces control her dreams. Neither she nor her visions are tainted by the precarious nature of human activities. Porphyro, on the other hand, has to circumvent real danger; but his emotional and sensory life becomes more and more intense as he advances beyond the dangers and closer to the object of his quest. He ascends through his senses; she through her imagination. Either route can lead to the involuntary submission of self to divine forces.

Their objectives are ultimately the same in that the savoring of love-making with an enchanting image of each other is their desire. Porphyro is enthralled by Madeline's beauty when she half awakes from her dream and finds herself confronted with the mortal incarnation of her imagined lover. She, on the other hand, is initially upset because the Porphyro before her does not match the Porphyro of her dream; but she quickly realizes that he is the only link she has with the rich loving that still tingles within her. At this point Porphyro says nothing, as "Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone." (Stanza XXXIII) His character has begun its eclipse as Madeline lures him beyond himself into a coalescence with her own transcending spirit.

> Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
> Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
> Into her dream he melted, as the rose
> Blendeth its odour with the violet, --
> (Stanza XXXVI)

Their souls unite at the zenith. Their essences, the loving instincts of our basic humanity, come together as one. At the pinnacle there are no differences to be noted in their characters, because their characters are non-existent. Immediately after the consummation, however, their individual characters begin to re-emerge.

To be sure, their characters are profoundly altered by the event. There is an irrefutable marriage of their hearts, and they are not to experience the same selfless-ness again. As they come away from the climax of their ascensions, Porphyro becomes the optimist, Madeline the pessimist. Once "St Agnes' moon hath set," Porphyro is anxious for them to slip away, for "the morning is at hand," and he assures her that "o'ver the southern moors I have a home for thee." His devotion is utter: "My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely bride! / Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest? / Thy beauty's shield, heartshap'd and vermeil dyed?" (Stanza XXXVIII) That, after Madeline, in the immediately preceding lines, has expressed her fears of his abandoning her.

> "Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.
> Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?
> I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,

Though thou forsakest a deceived thing;--
A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned
wing." (Stanza XXXVII)

Sensing trap doors, Madeline sneaks through the halls and into the storm with Porphyro: she the helpless, threatened love-victim, he the opportunistic, determined devotee. What character they do have emerges in relief as they come away from their moment of soul-splicing and return to the contradictory mortal condition.

"Isabella," or the "Pot of Basil," is another narrative poem which involves two mortal lovers and a vision. The lovers, however, engage in sentimental interaction much too obvious and routine to reflect the delicate force of "The Eve of St. Agnes." Furthermore, the vision is not a central structure and does not bring about an eclipse of character. This poem, however, deals with the deterioration of a character, the cause of which is the suffocation of that character's soul.

Isabella's brothers, wealthy and deceitful merchants of Florence, have designs for their sister to marry a noble who would further enhance the success of their own lucrative enterprises. Discovering that Isabella is seriously entertaining the love gestures of Lorenzo, a mere palmer, the brothers decide that he is to be murdered. Murdered he is, and buried in a forest. Isabella is told that Lorenzo has been impressed onto a foreign ship against his will, and his absence causes her to go into a total decline. She and

Lorenzo have been intoxicated by the ripeness of their love, and it has consumed their persons -- to the point where their characters suggest nothing but an obsession with thoughts and acts of tenderest affection. Their only function is to love. Once Lorenzo disappears, Isabella finds herself at the same point that Endymion is when he must await the decision of Fate: to ascend into a complete union with Love, or to fade away into loneliness, and wither from want of Love's nourishment. So too with Madeline, for it is suggested she will die if she doesn't flee with Porphyro. But both Endymion and Madeline pursue Love, and finally, as mortals, see it realized. Lorenzo, however, is dead. In mortal terms a renewal of their love is impossible, and Isabella's perverted recovery and coveting of Lorenzo's mouldy skull in her bedroom merely emphasizes the futility of a mortal fulfillment. She selfishly guards and makes love-gestures to his remains, but continues to deteriorate. There can be no mortal reciprocation, no "sweet sensations" shared in the ascension of consciousness. Lorenzo can not rejoin Isabella, but Isabella will join him.

There is a suggestion of another realm of existence beyond mortality where spirits exist. When Lorenzo is buried, the poem reads

> Ah! when a soul doth thus its freedom win,
> It aches in loneliness--is ill at peace
> As the break-covert blood-hounds of such sins:
> (Stanza XXXVIII)

Lorenzo's spirit cannot rest. It has been unjustly deprived, and it becomes the aim of the narrative to rectify the crime for the sake of Love. When his spirit appears to Isabella in a vision, revealing to her his condition and his whereabouts, Lorenzo offers as well some thoughts on her condition:

> " . . . thy paleness makes me glad;
> Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel
> A greater love through all my essence steal."
> (Stanza XXXX)

His painful distance from her in the grave causes his soul to savor the slightest gesture of affection from her:

> "Go, shed one tear, upon my heather-bloom
> And it shall comfort me within the tomb."
> (Stanza XXXVIII)

But he knows that her soul will soon join him when she dies. Isabella, in turn, reveals a growing store of affection for Lorenzo after he has appeared to her in the vision:

> "Sweet Spirit, thou hast school'd my infancy:
> I'll visit thee for this, and kiss thine eyes,
> And greet thee morn and even in the skies."
> (Stanza XLII)

One in death and one in life are anticipating an eventual union in an everlasting afterlife. The love between Isabella and Lorenzo cannot die. The essences of their characters, their souls, have been in command from the

beginning. Lorenzo's death merely insures the deliciously painful tyranny of their soul's alliance.

Whereas Isabella and Lorenzo are without any significant character traits apart from their function as lovers, the principal character in "Lamia," a young Corinthian named Lycius, is the most involved of Keats' narrative characterizations. It can be said of Endymion and Porphyro as well as Lorenzo that their function is their nature: they are defined as characters in terms of their roles as lovers in quest of the person they love. Lycius, who is lured into love by a serpent-become-woman named Lamia, confounds and eventually destroys the development of the love relationship because of traits in his own character. His relationship with the beautiful Lamia is as much undermined by doubt and excessive pride as it is by the fact that Lamia herself is a teasing illusion.

Furthermore, Lycius' soul is never convincingly engaged by the pursuing goddess, Lamia. He indeed experiences the beginnings of an epiphanal moment when Lamia first appears to him as a beckoning goddess. The immediate impact is powerful.

> And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,
> Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,
> And still the cup was full, -- while he, afraid
> Lest she should vanish ere his lip had paid
> Due adoration, thus began to adore; . . .
> (ll. 251-5)
>
> Even as thou vanish so shall I die. (l. 260)

He is already willing to sacrifice everything for her. He is being controlled. But it's only for a moment, for in the middle of this sudden intensity, Lamia abandons him and comes coaxing back as a real woman. Lycius then has his love object: there is no ideal to pursue. She has become an illusory, tangible deceit which Lycius will ingest into his psyche. A doomed pretender, she becomes nevertheless a very substantial conquest in Lycius' mind. She becomes, in fact, an extension of his proud self-image, to the extent that when her corporal being vanishes, Lycius too must die. His pride and delight have blindly consumed a poisonous flower. Lamia does not control Lycius, but she does determine what happens to him, and his final self-effacement is the antithesis of the character eclipse of Endymion, Madeline, and Porphyro

Lamia, on the other hand, has had her own vision of Lycius in a dream. This is significant in view of the lines,

> Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass / Their pleasures in a long immortal dream. (I, ll. 127-128)

Such is in evidence at outset of the poem when Hermes, sneaking away from Jove's court, swoops down into the forests of Crete and induces Lamia, the serpent, to let him find a beautiful nymph who hides in the woods. Promising in return to give Lamia a woman's form and the chance to

pursue her envisioned lover near Corinth, Hermes confronts the nymph and wins her over, as

> Into the green-recessed woods they flew
> Now grew they pale, as mortal lovers do.
> (ll. 144-5)

This little opening episode is to contrast markedly with the outcome of Lamia's love-quest.

Lamia comes to be in much the same position as Isabella, for she loves and gives physical gestures of affection to a lover whose soul is not responding. Thus, she must try to instill love into a person whose mortal essence is to remain impure. Lorenzo is literally dead; Lycius, no longer needing to dream (his soul becoming a clod under the feeding force of his selfish character), is figuratively dead. Moreover, when Lamia first dreams of Lycius, she had seen him in a particular way:

> She saw the young Corinthian Lycius
> Charioting foremost in the envious race,
> Like a young Jove with calm uneager face,
> And fell into a swooning love of him.
> (I, ll. 216-219)

To her he smacks of something immortal, and her reaction is one of "swooning" love that promises to be sloppy. Her objective is to possess him in whatever way necessary, rather than appeal to his higher faculties and encourage an ascension and intensification of his senses to the point where his soul, wherein the purest love is harbored, -- and thus his character -- can be won. He becomes an

illusion of the ultimate. Her own selfishness becomes her blinders.

As mentioned, Lycius' character alone is incapable of withstanding the bludgeoning powers of an aggressive goddess. His character can, however, deal with a real woman, and this will be dealt with presently. Neither Lycius nor Lamia sees the other for what he really is. As a result, the lovers lead each other down a collision course from which neither will survive.

Lamia is to rely on witchcraft rather than divine persuasion in her hunt for Lycius' affections. When Hermes first changes Lamia into a woman, it could be said of the latter:

> Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain
> To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain;
> Define their pettish limits, and estrange
> Their points of contact, and swift counterchange;
> (I, ll. 191-194)

Such power she utilizes when she first encounters Lycius, who is walking toward Corinth, daydreaming. She calls herself into his trance and he turns, "Orpheus-like at an Eurydice," to see her beautiful presence. He is immediately enthralled. She then toys with his intoxication, suggesting that his "floor of clay" could promise no joy to a goddess, and bids adieu. Lamia's basic selfishness is evident from the start. Crushed, Lycius is immediately left groping with his fall from the heights, paled with pain, when Lamia returns as a woman and embraces him. Through her abrupt,

blitzing technique, Lamia succeeds; for

> Lycius from death awoke into amaze,
> To see her still, and singing so sweet lays;
> Then from amaze into delight he fell
> To hear her whisper woman's lore so well:
> (I, ll. 322-325)

Just his senses are left humming, not his soul -- the latter being activated only in the death of one's self. The transition from death-to-amaze-to-delight suggests the gradual return of Lycius' control over himself. Lamia, in becoming mortal, unknowingly loses her power and becomes ensnared in the will of Lycius.

Once Lycius' consciousness and senses return, once his "bliss is unperplexed from its neighbor pain" and he thinks that things are now real in terms that he can understand and handle, his logic takes over and Lamia is no longer the tyrant of his will. He wants this beautiful woman to be his, and begins to delight in forcing her to see things his way. Her pleas to him not to arrange for a public viewing of his bride arouses his ire.

> He thereat was stung,
> Perverse, with stronger fancy to reclaim
> Her wild and timid nature to his aim:
> Besides, for all his love, in self despite,
> Against his better self, he took delight
> Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new.
> (II, ll. 69-74)

And Lamia's response suggests the nature of her commitment to the mortal manner.

> She burnt, she lov'd the tyranny,
> And all subdued, consented to the hour
> When to the bridal he should lead his paramour.

Her senses are still with her, but Lycius comes to dominate her will. She carries on, able to create a palace and decorate it with people and dressing, but totally unable to affect Lycius in ways other than by her natural beauty.

> So being left alone,
> (Lycius was gone to summon all his kin)
> And knowing surely she could never win
> His foolish heart from its mad pompousness,
> She set herself, high-thoughted, how to dress
> The misery in fit magnificence. (ll. 111-116)

Rather than luring Lycius away from his character by way of a soul-releasing transcendence into the realm of Love, where she might milk to the lees his helpless devotion, Lamia has become a very vulnerable slave -- to Lycius' arbitrary, possessive nature, and to the chance circumstances of a rational human society.

When Appolonius, Lycius' teacher and the Master of Objective Reasoning, reveals Lamia's true identity at the marriage banquet, she is helpless. Originally able to toy with human wills, Lamia mistakenly betrays her true nature and becomes herself a person to be toyed with. She is destroyed by a power equal to her own. Just as she could capture the fancy of mortals and torture them, so the incisive objectivity of Appolonius decimates her disguise. Imagination can not, nor is it meant to fight Reason. Nor

can either element enter the other's realm and maintain its integrity. Lamia, the serpent with mysterious powers, could not survive in a human society where Reason tends to make man a God in his own image, and proves to be a less elusive alternative than Imagination. Reason is the higher power in the temporal realm, and will always prevent divine fellowship with essence. Moreover, Lamia accepts the domination of Lycius' selfish will as a way to fulfill her own; but when she confronts the cold penetrating stare of Appolonius and is accused of being the serpent, her will collides with a mind that sees her for what she really is.

Lamia's mortal being is executed by Reasoning. Lycius' death, which immediately follows that of Lamia and ends the poem, is at the hands of a serpent. He has come to find, as do the bees, that "there is richest juice in poison flowers." Her subtle venom has infected his heart, and the sterile antibiotics of Appolonius can not help him. Lycius cannot survive the loss of something he has come to be so proud of. Lamia represents his own attainment; she is testimony to his self-importance. She has caused in Lycius a fatal entanglement in his own character. Her mortal immediacy and Lycius' easy "delight" neglect mortality's essence. He is the bogus ideal. It is the evasive nature of divinity and necessity of pursuit by mortals (not Lamias), causing an eclipse of character, that brings about

the highest intensity and greatest potential of the human condition. Lycius' character remains in tact because his epiphanal moment, when he first sees the goddess Lamia on his way to Corinth, is aborted by her transformation from goddess to woman -- causing, in turn, his change from the death that began an eclipse of his character, to the transitional "amazement," to a self-indulgent "delight." Lycius' return to habitual self is real, and quick. He is, as a result, not pale, but salubriant; not dead from transcendence, but alive, and in tact as a result of temporal revelation.

The cycle of sensations felt by Lycius, from the imminent "death" of a character-killing eclipse, to amazement at a dazzling reincarnation, to a sensual-emotional delight at possessing a beautiful woman, to the final poisonous purge and actual death, is condensed into a tight, graphic dirge in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." In this poem, a man speaks of his experience, just passed, with "a fairy's child." He is dying, as noted by the curious passing stranger:

> I see a lilly on thy brow,
> With anguish moist and fever dew;
> And on thy cheek a fading rose
> Fast withereth too.[4] (Stanza III)

Such outward signs of inner death have been brought on by two intense visions, one juxtaposed on top of the other.

Meeting a gorgeous woman in the woods, this man begins a rapturous courtship -- the woman speaking to him only with her eyes. Guiding him to her "elfin grot," the mysterious woman lulls him into sleep, wherein he has a most foreboding dream. He sees powerful men, paled by a common curse, warning him against the woman-without-mercy who has him in rein. "On the cold hillside" he then awakes, the presence of beauty torn from his grasp. He has been brutally severed from "her wild sad eyes" in a place of enchantment, where "the sedge is wither'd from the lake."

The epiphanal transcendence leads directly into a vale of tears and utter despair. Normally, as evidenced with Madeline and Endymion, the descent following the fellowship with essence is most difficult, and it is most discouraging just to return to the absence of the visionary splendor. In comparison, the real world is most barren. Both Madeline and Endymion, however, are able to pursue their envisioned loves, since they nevertheless continue to be preoccupied with the sanctity and beauty of the object of their new quest. The knight in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" not only descends hard from his soul's flight, but in the descent he experiences a most dramatic condemnation of his new love. His dream has become a nightmare; and the callous abortion of his vision by an equally convincing voice causes a devastating collision with his self that he cannot survive. He is much like Lycius.

For him, there can be no "hope beyond the shadow of a dream." There can be no pursuit since Keats provides no new quest -- as with Madeline and Endymion -- in whose sanctity and beauty the knight can believe. The belle dame shows no mercy in assaulting his senses, and there can be no mistake about the subsequent warning. This clash of deep antithetical promptings leaves him dangling, unable to function. He can not continue onwards to the threshold of ascension, nor to the brink of suicide -- he can only "palely loiter" and let his waning remnant reach extinction. The silence of the curious passer-by, moreover, suggests the acknowledgement of an irreversible malaise. Like Peona, when she heard Endymion tell of his first vision, this listener

> . . . was very loth
> To answer; feeling well that breathed words
> Would all be lost, unheard, and vain as swords
> Against the enchased crocodile, or leaps
> Of grasshoppers against the sun.
> (Endymion, I, ll. 711-715)

And perhaps this listener, too, like Peona,

> . . . weeps,
> And wonders; struggles to devise some blame;
> To put on such a look as would say, Shame
> On this poor weakness! but, for all her strife,
> She could as soon have crushed away the life
> From a sick dove. (I, ll. 715-720)

The significance of the wounded lover, like that of the traveler, lies in his experience rather than in his self. Keats again avoids any depth of characterization. For it is his intention to portray the clawing of Man's

soul no matter which way He turns in love. If he surrenders himself to the magnetic mysteries of La Belle Dame, it will be painful; he will become her slave, and suffer. Or if he hears the advice of the past lovers and is pulled away from his quest by human judgements, then he finds himself with the aching emptiness of a condemned and aborted dream remnant. The Dame's lover, again like Endymion, Lorenzo, and Porphyro, is to be defined in terms of his function as a crucified lover. Having no name and no particular station in life, he is the most deliberately universalized character in Keats' narrative love poems. Above the haunting silence of a receding lake, he is impaled on the cold hillside by the paradox of love: To bleed yourself by merciless truth, or be bled by a poisonous, relentless woman -- this is the agonizing choice of all men, for bleeding is the price of love.

All of Keats' lovers experience some form of vision that enables them to escape for a moment their respective selves. It is not Keats' primary intention, however, to trace the evolution of each character through the drama of a far-reaching vision. Each character is indeed affected profoundly by the presence of a beautiful being, but it is the moments of essence, of transcedent loving, that comprise the ultimate significance of a person. For Keats, what happens immediately after the rise to fellowship with

essence is of secondary importance in the human condition. For the character-eclipse which allows a soul's awakening and subsequent quest for divine meaning is the finest condition of any character.

These five narrative love poems by John Keats suggest symbolism more than verisimilitude as the salient assumption in the characterizations of his protagonist-visionaries. Their characters are symbolic of Man's susceptibility to the imagination's intuition and to transcending truths, made possible by his latent ability to journey beyond himself to realms where he can assimilate into the quintessence of Truth and Beauty, through Love. These distinguishing potentialities are realized in temporary, parenthetical moments, but there can be no deeper experience for Man. Only then does he experience the renewal, the "renaissance," the leaps of Adam unto the realization of Truth. If, therefore, the tone and teachings of the visions are savored and sought for in more temporal existence, there is a promise of a personal depth and intensity for the duration of one's mortal life. The Keatsian visionary experience is in fact symbolic of a higher reality, a realm of truth that is not apparent in the usual give and take of human affairs.

Chapter II THE FUNCTIONARIES

Although the ascension of a Keatsian vision of transcendent love leads to the revelation and celebration of Mankind's finest condition -- the release and expression of his soul -- the experience is a highly personal one, and need not be understood by others in human society who are preoccupied with less ephemeral affairs. Yet live we must in a human context. Keats never closed his eyes in his own quest for truth, and there is an array of important minor people in the background of his narrative poems whose characterizations also comment, in one way or another, on the nature of the mortal condition.

It can be generally said that none of the minor characters understands what is happening to the visionary-protagonist and that, as a consequence, each of them is skeptical. It is the nature of the skepticism in each instance, however, that determines its effect on the fate of the visionary, the effect being either benign or malignant. With Endymion, for example, the effect is benign to the point of being a kind of gentle consolation to him. This is the role of Peona, Endymion's sister and confidante, who tries to stay at his side while he is seized by the bewildering visions, and patiently listens to his descriptions of visions and feelings. She is the balm which Endymion finds most comforting when he descends out of his vision

into the painful absence of its luring beauty, and finds that

> . . . - all the pleasant hues
> Of heaven and earth had faded: deepest shades
> Were deepest dungeons; heaths and sunny glades
> Were full of pestilent light; our taintless rills
> Seem'd sooty, and o'er-spread with upturn'd gills
> Of dying fish; the vermeil rose had blown
> In frightful scarlet, and its thorns out-grown
> Like spiked sloe. (Endymion, I, ll. 691-699)

From the horrors of such disillusionment Peona often provides a spiritual release:

> Peona, his sweet sister: of all those,
> His friends, the dearest. Hushing signs she made,
> And breath'd a sister's sorrow to persuade
> A yielding up, a cradling on her care.
> Her eloquence did breathe away the curse:
> She led him, like some midnight spirit nurse
> Of happy changes in emphatic dreams,
> Along a path between two little streams . . .

Endymion, once his reason restores his will and he can see the sorrow that his sister holds for him, confesses to her therapeutic nature in saying,

> Can I want
> Aught else, aught nearer heaven, than such tears? (I, ll. 473-4)

Peona's affectionate willingness to comfort her troubled brother is quite evident, but it is caused as much as anything by her belief that Endymion is being visited by something awesome that she would like to see vanish, but which she senses, through sympathy with her brother's floundering, can be questioned. "How light," she asks,

"Must dreams themselves be; seeing they're
more slight
Than the mere nothing that engenders them!
Then wherefore sully the entrusted gem
Of high and noble life with thoughts so sick?
Why pierce high-fronted honour to the quick
For nothing but a dream?"
(I, ll. 754-760)

But although this awesome phenomenon can be questioned, it cannot be condemned, since she herself has never experienced such a controlling force. She knows too, from her brother's looks and words, that the dream hex is real. In the final passage of the poem, Endymion confesses before Phoebe and Peona to being a helpless captive of his vision.

As feels a dreamer what doth most create
His own particular fright, so these three
felt: (IV, ll. 889-90)

Peona's skepticism is tempered with tolerance because of the vibrations she vicariously shares with Endymion. She cannot divorce Reason from Imagination, but she is able to admit to the possibility of higher truths because her skepticism is balanced by compassion. It is Peona who offers a stunned, but nevertheless human blessing to the marriage of Endymion and his goddess, Cynthia, and whose skepticism is waning as she "went / Home through the gloomy wood in wonderment." (IV, ll. 1002-3)

This wonder is not to be shared by any of Keats' other minor characters. The poem "Endymion" expresses a youthful exuberance for the worship of things beautiful and beatific celebration of essences. Its idealism con-

trasts with the moderation or balance -- in its characters as well as in everything else -- that is to come in the maturing integrity of Keats' search for truth. After Peona, the minor characters are to provide counter statements of, or represent alternatives to, the symbolic stances of the visionaries, and thus introduce an element of tension which accentuates the ramifications of choice. The effect of a minor character's divergent outlook on a major character may again be benign or malignant; it may or may not destroy the option of a real choice for the visionary. In "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "Isabella," for instance, there are minor characters who, for our purposes, offer important alternatives.

In each of these two poems there is an old handi-woman who is taken into confidence by a protagonist -- Angela with Porphyro in "Eve of St. Agnes," and the old maid with Isabella. Both of these older women suddenly find themselves alongside a character they have reason to accept, but whose mission is slightly frightening to them. They both agree to aid in the protagonists' missions, in spite of their own skepticism; and they both also end up shuddering at what they have done. They reflect a state of earthly apprehension which serves as a dramatic foil to the clear vision and unflinching resolve of the lovers.

The old nurse who accompanies Isabella to dig up Lorenzo's corpse is less developed as a character than

Porphyro's confidante, the old beldame, Angela. The nurse, whose presence is felt in only two of the 63 stanzas of the poem, serves to reflect a natural alignment with the reader's emotions and curiosity when Isabella leaves to respond to the impelling anguish of her vision of the dead Lorenzo. It is she who dramatizes the intensification of the plot by asking

> What feverous hectic flame
> Burns in thee, child? -- What good can thee betide,
> That thou should'st smile again?
> (Isabella, Stanza XLIV)

and who reflects the sympathy of the reader:

> That old nurse stood beside her wondering,
> Until her heart felt pity to the core
> At sight of such a dismal labouring,
> And so she kneeled, with her locks all hoar,
> And put her lean hands to the horrid thing:
> (Stanza XXXXVIII)

Her function is similar to the single-actor chorus in Elizabethan drama who interjects transitional and foreshadowing comments, and serves as a corroborative synthesizer for the reader. Her role is dramatically provoking, but inconsequential in the plot, and therefore there is no need for even minimal characterization. She is the embodiment of a question that emerges from the circumstances rather than a statement which, when combined with other statements, forces the emergence of questions.

Angela in "Eve of St. Agnes" represents, on the other hand, a point of view whose merits are to be weighed against

the character perspectives of the lovers. Her act of helping Porphyro to locate Madeline's chamber is an integral part of the story's plot, but it is her attitude which is most important in determining her significance in the narrative. To begin with, she wears a mask, the disguise being a nervous and righteous practicality -- her real self, her essence, being an unhinged and coveted belief in supernatural machinations. She is a kind of witch unto herself, "Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand," and full of tickled amazement when she realizes that Porphyro has appeared from nowhere on St. Agnes' Eve, a night when spirits play romantic games with mortal pawns. She recognizes the imminence of mysterious, mischievous spirits, and for a moment lets down her mask to indulge gleefully in the shadowy escape to communion with secretive spirits. There are two stanzas that serve as a parenthetical delineation of Angela's coveted madness. It is she who says,

> "St. Agnes! Ah! it is St. Agnes' Eve --
> Yet men will murder upon holy days:
> Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve,
> And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays,
> To venture so: it fills me so with amaze
> To see thee, Porphyro! -- St. Agnes' Eve!
> God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays
> This very night: good angels her deceive!
> But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time to
> grieve." (Eve of St. Agnes, Stanza XIV)

Then, it is said of Angela:

> Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon
> While Porphyro upon face doth look,
> Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone

> Who keepeth clos'd a won'drous riddle-book,
> As spectacled she sits in chimney nook.
> But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told
> His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook
> Tears, at the thought of those enchantments
> cold,
> And Madeline asleep in lap of legend old.
> (Stanza XV)

Porphyro is here witnessing the sudden transformation of an old woman from the appearance of a conscience-ridden "old beldame, weak in body and soul" to the reality of an old sorceress whose mind is momentarily titillated by the magic manipulation of people and events. Just as Angela comments on Porphyro when she first encounters him and learns of his purpose, so Porphyro could say of Angela when he detects signs of her emerging essence, "Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem."

But Angela reverts to her masked mortality immediately thereafter, and tries to be indignant over Porphyro's proposal to weave himself into Madeline's virginal rites on St. Agnes' Eve, just as she was skittish about hiding Porphyro from very real dangers in the castle at the beginning of the poem. Yet the fact remains that she <u>does</u> lead Porphyro to a closet in her lady's room in spite of having just blurted out

> "A cruel man and impious thou art:
> Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
> Alone with her good angels, for apart
> From wicked men like thee."
> (Stanza XVI)

and in spite of her subsequent retreat from the closeted

confidante "with agues in her brain." Angela's latent, real self controls her attitude, ultimately. She will appear stricken with fear as an old faltering creature, even at her death when she dies "palsy-twitched, with meagre face deform"; but it is her hidden, inner sporting with spirits who seek delight in the midst of danger that is the private truth and the real determinant of her actions.

Angela's role in the narrative has a benign effect on Madeline and Porphyro because she only appears disturbed by their actions and in fact relishes it. Just as Porphyro and Madeline emerge from their mystic union into a confrontation with a threatening, stormy environment, so Angela indulges in celebration of the conjuror of love for only a moment before she too must face the perils and logic of the everyday world. Her condemnation of Porphyro's actions is a smokescreen of propriety that she feels compelled to express in order to survive, but she wants to believe in the auguries and wagaries of her heart and her magical instincts.

Both Angela and the old nurse in "Isabella" leave the scene on the threshold of a climax they have helped to bring about for young lovers. Though physically barren, their minds are fertile and celebrate the divinations of love in search of itself. It is Angela's salubrious

benignancy, however, that in fact fans the flames of Porphyro's love while others' and her own backs are turned, and shows her to be, as the mid-wife of the whole story, a round and surprisingly complete character.

With the Beadsman in "Eve of St. Agnes," and the Brothers in "Isabella," one can see a platonic-materialistic spectrum which also provides contrasting elements for the love-adventures of Madeline and Porphyro, and Isabella. These lovers are to indulge in affairs which are neither purely spiritual nor purely worldly, but a delicate and intense blending of the two. For Keats was careful to articulate the potential balance, as well as the possible symbiotic union, of the mortal condition and immortal meaning on the lives of his lovers. Madeline and Porphyro, as well as Isabella and Lorenzo, are to achieve transcendence through interaction which is as sensually exciting as it is spiritually fulfilling. It should be noted, however, that any life which is purely self-indulgent in a worldly way, or purely self-effacing in a spiritual manner, contains the seeds of its own condemnation in Keats' narrative love poems.

The old Beadsman is engaged in ascetic supplication, a rote, anti-romantic attempt to achieve the immortal blessing of heaven through self-denial. Receding from a state of being, he sustains his disciplined self-destruction to a point where he has become nothing -- a kind of

The outward antithesis of the Beadsman are the greed-ridden Florentine brothers of Isabella, whose "hungry pride and gainful cowardice" make them as blind to the latent essence of life as the Beadsman's total commitment does for him. The love experience of Isabella and Lorenzo happens despite the brothers' opposition and Lorenzo's murder. Though Lorenzo is dead, the earnestness and authenticity of Isabella's love can not falter, and her affections can be realized only in death. Her brothers' skepticism and their consequent killing only serve to fix forever the values that Isabella shares with her lover. The brothers think that the value of anyone or anything is gone once it no longer physically exists. Psychic and physical death, however, are always very close behind for the jilted lover whose sole quest for love's mortal fulfillment is tragically thwarted. Inasmuch as Isabella has been cheated by fate, her only recourse is to savor until death the sadness that stems from the mortal loss of her lover. Upon her death, the love of Isabella and Lorenzo is confirmed forever, and the brothers' design for their own eventual promotion has become a collision course that exposes them as conspirators in a ghastly violation of humanity's sacred right to celebrate the gravitations of its soul. Isabella has no choice but to die because of the attitude and actions of her brothers, and the reader has little choice but to sympathize with Isabella's plight and condemn her brothers'

living death. He is of no use to humanity, and certainly of no use unto himself, the poem ends with

> The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,
> For aye unsought-for slept among his ashes cold. (Stanza XXXXII)

His route does not ascend; it involves no visions. His self is subservient to the tyranny of a contrived, artificial religion and nursed by the subtle poison of its call for penance. Rather than nearing heaven, a place of eternal life, he finds himself enveloped in a real shroud of dust, symbolizing his nearness to extinction. He will not escape the ashes, but join them.

The Beadsman's presence at the beginning and end of the poem explains his function as a character. In no way does he affect the plot or the main characters, but rather he provides the reader with a contrast between submission to the rigid dictates of a rooted institution, and submission to the promptings of one's heart and soul. He also marks the outer line of the poem's framework, the essence of life being expressed in Madeline's chamber, the innermost and warmest sector of both the setting and the experience. The Beadsman's sterility, coldness, and stagnancy set up and highlight the fertility, warmth, and blossoming of the lovers. He offers an empty alternative to the reader, and his position at the start and finish of the poem forces the reader to look beyond his death-luring, senseless rituals for the promise of human joy.

vicious greed.

The Beadsman and the brothers are deliberately described as inept and shallow, suggesting possible mutations of the human spirit. They represent narrow and restrictive perspectives, and are not meant to be considered as equal in significance to the soul-freeing frame of mind which can be observed in Keats' lovers. Any respect by the poet for counter perspectives is reserved for Appolonius in "Lamia," and the group of men who warn the lover in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." These two minor characterizations not only offer directly opposing points of view to those held by the mortal protagonists, but have a malignant, indeed fatal, effect on the latter.

Appolonius is like the Beadsman in that he is more a symbol than an individual, but his function is not peripheral, nor benign. Representing the incisive power of reason and "cold philosophy," he is both the dispassionate guardian of realism and the ruthless prosecutor of falsehood who can not tolerate the mutual disregard of Lamia and Lycius for the real nature of themselves and each other. Appolonius is at war with the realities of the imagination and their correlated emotions. Men who elect to roam in immortal imaginings, and goddesses who choose to walk among mortals, are consequences of an un-Appolonian poetic license. It is not Appolonian to recognize the infinite verities of the human imagination. It is worth noting,

however, that the entanglement in which Lycius and Lamia find themselves is not part of the "Richer entanglements, enthralment far / More self-destroying, leading, by degrees / To the chief intensity." [5] Lamia's hyper-extension of her own immortal license, and the hubris exercised by the prideful Lycius, almost call for the contemptuous accusation by Appolonius and the subsequent confirmation of the latter's thoughts. Keats purposely avoids a direct challenge of an innocent and endearing imaginative lover by the cold vision of the strictly rational man, for that would suggest a betrayal of his high faith in the divine promptings of those whose souls are the sanctuaries of immortal intimations. The rational poison of Appolonius had no place in "Endymion." "Lamia," however, suggests the emergence in the more mature Keatsian mind of a dichotomy which was not to be resolved before the poet's premature demise. Reason, symbolized by Appolonius and the gaunt ghosts in "La Belle Dame," see reality only in terms of objective truth. Like Boileau, in Epistles IX,

> Rien n'est beau que le vrai; le vrai seul est aimable;
> Il doit regnet partout, et meme dans la fable . . .
> (Nothing is beautiful unless it is true: Only the true is pleasant;
> it should reign everywhere, even in myth . . .)

"For Boileau, as for much of the Age of "Reason," truth is more important than beauty. In reversing this claim, Keats

was to recognize that 'with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration.' 6

Yet Keats came to acknowledge, in "La Belle Dame" and "Lamia," the gulf between Imagination and Reason, between Permanence and Transcience (of Immortality and Mortality) wherein characters are often torn by the turbulence ever apparent in the opposition of these antithetical forces.

Chapter III THE POET: CONCLUSION

The parabolic nature of "Lamia," the absence of a character-eclipse, and the more complete characterization of Lycius, all suggest that John Keats had a different perspective toward this love narrative than toward any of the others. For the first time, in "Lamia," an explicit personality begins to emerge, and an individual human being's will comes into play. Because of Lycius' self-centered personality and because of a built-in collision course between Lamia and Apollonius, the "love" in the narrative is doomed. The nature of Lycius as a character becomes clear as the story unfolds. With Endymion, Isabella and Lorenzo, Madeline and Porphyro, and the lover in "La Belle Dame," it has been mentioned above that their nature is their function-of-loving, and/or that a character-eclipse takes place to enable their sovereign souls to rise up and experience a state of divine rapture. In none of these instances does depth of character become clearer as the story unfolds: there is, indeed, not much more at first glance than an impression of a puppet with a name, susceptible to love. The invisible reality, and the key to understanding the dynamics of characterization in four-fifths of Keats' narrative love poems, is that Keats himself, as artist, is the model for his main characters. But in

order to understand this, one must understand the Keatsian concept of the artist as character, and the poet's view of the most meaningful mortal condition.

The Keatsian principle of Negative Capability,

> that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason --7

suggests the importance of ego annihilation and the voluntary suspension of "consequitive reasoning" as a prerequisite for true rapport with high truths. The Keatsian view of artistic essence involves a process -- an amoral assimilation of sensory stimuli and the clarification of the Truths indigenous to observed forms through the filters of imagination. Passing moral judgement hinders the artist's ability to love truth for truth's sake. The artist's self is instead a sensory agent of Nature, controlled rather than controlling, and obedient not only to the oblique and subtle dictates of Nature and Imagination, but also to the fine filtering of the poetic process. The artist is an omniscient being who sees everything for what it says of itself to him. All experience contains a kind of organic magic, caused by something divine, distilled in poetics, and expressed through the involuntary sensitivities of a non-person, or image-reflector, like John Keats, --or like the visionary characters in his narrative love poems.

Endymion, Isabella, Madeline and Porphyro, and the

stunned lover in "La Belle Dame" are modeled, essentially, on a preferred strain of Man -- a strain which, rather than having feet of clay, has a body of soul, tethered to Love, capable of carrying him beyond mortal bound and his inconsequential character into a timeless synthesis with immortal Truths. Such beings are the infallible and critical meaning-makers, since their minds' eyes and their hearts' yearnings are unencumbered by the circumstantial handcuffs of character. Only when Keats confronts a flesh-and-blood character of clay in Lycius does he suggest the frustrations that come from searching for meaning <u>in</u> one's self <u>rather</u> than <u>through</u> or <u>beyond</u> one's self. The entire experience in "Lamia" dramatizes how the free spirit can be vulnerable to the analytical mind. Reason chains man unto himself and allows him to encounter experience only on his own terms. It suppresses the awakening of the soul, and ensnares the natural propensities of the Imagination. One's self must be, but may it be as varied and adaptable as Life itself. May intimations of soul be the pilot, and may the mysterious forces of divine essence (or love) chart the course. The experience of Lycius suggests the collisions inherent in the abandonment of "negative capability" in searching for love. Lycius wants to command rather than be commanded. His adventure contrasts deliberately and emphatically with the more Keatsian "non-characters" in the

other poems whose souls lift them into the highest and most intense reaches of divine love.

The life force in these main characters of the love narratives, excluding Lycius, is Keats himself in his preferred self-image -- of artistic invisibility and an amoral surrender to the dictates of his poetic sensibilities and his soul. It is his visions of Love, and Truth, and Beauty which are the respective characters. The characters, like the poet, serve as Aeolian instruments for the magnitude and minutiae of intimations of immortality. The characters are the shadows of those intimations; the intimations are the manifest chorus of the soul within John Keats.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Among such writers most worthy of note are: Bate, Walter Jackson, John Keats (Cambridge, Mass., 1963); Goldberg, M.A., Poetics of Romanticism (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1969); Ridley, M.R., Keats' Craftsmanship (Oxford, England, 1933); Ward, Aileen, John Keats: The Making of a Poet (New York, 1963); Wasserman, Earl R., The Finer Tone: Keats' Major Poems (Baltimore, Maryland, 1953).

[2] By narrative love poems are meant "Endymion," "Isabella," "Eve of St. Agnes," "Lamia," and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci."

[3] "Endymion," I, ll. 857.

[4] This text is taken from Keats' original version of the poem rather than his later version.

[5] "Endymion," I, ll. 798-800.

[6] M.A. Goldberg, The Poetics of Romanticism (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press, 1969), pp. 127-8.

[7] From a letter to George and Thomas Keats, his brother, dated December 22, 1817: as quoted in The Letters of John Keats, ed. Maurice B. Forman, Fourth Edition, Oxford Univ. Press, 1952, pp. 69-72.

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* Stated in accordance with plans as of December, 1971.